

Alaska Earning a High School Diploma

Alaska Law (Sec 14.03.075) requires students to pass a competency exam in the areas of reading, English, and mathematics, or receive a waiver from the local governing body, to earn a diploma. Students must also meet all local requirements. The exam, called the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination (HSGQE), is first administered to students in the spring of their sophomore year. Students who are not proficient on portions of the exam must retake the exam at least once yearly while in school until they have passed. A student who is a child with a disability and who does not achieve a passing score, with or without accommodations, is eligible to receive a diploma if the student successfully completes an alternative assessment program. The HSGQE alternative assessment program is the Modified HSGQE and/or the Nonstandardized HSGQE. A student who meets local requirements but does not pass the exam can earn a Certificate of Achievement rather than a diploma. Students who have earned a Certificate of Achievement may continue to take the HSGQE after they are no longer students.

The following chart is a summary guide to provide information about high school graduation options for students, but is not intended to provide detailed understanding of the regulations. Special Education directors, high school principals, and high school special education teachers should read the regulations regarding special education students and the HSGQE and become familiar with the Participation Guidelines.

Exam or Methodology	Leads To	To Qualify	Who Determines	Participation Guidelines & Regulation Reference
HSGQE	Diploma	All students take in the spring of their sophomore year, and continue to take portions on which they are not proficient at least once yearly while they are in school.	This assessment is required for all students. Students with disabilities or those who are LEP may take this assessment with or without accommodations.	PG – Overview, page 5 4 AAC 06.775
HSGQE with Accommodations	Diploma	A student with a disability on an IEP or 504 plan, or students who are limited English proficient, may take the HSGQE with accommodations. Students may take the exam with accommodations the first time the exam is administered, and continue to take the exams with accommodations until they have passed all portions.	For a student with a disability on an IEP or 504 plan, the decision is made by the team and documented in the plan. For a student who is LEP the decision is made by a team, which should include the child’s teacher and input from a parent. If an accommodation is actually a modification the test will be invalidated and not scored.	PG – pages 7 – 13 4 AAC 06.775(c)
Modified HSGQE	Diploma	A student with a disability who does not pass a portion of the HSGQE may take the Modified HSGQE if the student requires modifications in addition to the accommodations already provided.	The IEP or 504 team indicates the student needs an alternative assessment program for the HSGQE on the student’s plan. The team completes the Modified HSGQE application and submits it to EED for approval. If EED denies approval the team may appeal decision to the commissioner.	PG – pages 16 – 18 4 AAC 06.775(g) 4 AAC 06.775(h) 4 AAC 06.775(j)

Exam or Methodology	Leads To	To Qualify	Who Determines	Participation Guidelines & Regulation Reference
Nonstandardized HSGQE (Juried assessment of student work)	Diploma	A student with a disability who does not pass a portion of the HSGQE may take the Nonstandardized HSGQE if the student meets the qualifications outlined in the Participation Guidelines (the qualifications are reprinted on the next page of this document).	The IEP or 504 team indicates the student needs an alternative assessment program for the HSGQE on the student's plan. The team completes the Nonstandardized HSGQE application and submits it to EED for approval. If EED denies approval the team may appeal decision to the commissioner.	PG – pages 18 – 20 4 AAC 06.775(i) 4 AAC 06.775(j)
Waiver	Diploma	Students may receive a waiver from the local governing body if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The student arrives within the final two semesters of his or her intended year of graduation. ▪ Parent dies within the last semester of the student's intended year of graduation. ▪ A serious or sudden illness, or a physical injury, prevents the student from taking the exam in the final semester of his or her intended year of graduation. ▪ A disability arises too late in the student's high school career to develop a meaningful and valid assessment. ▪ A student has passed a competency exam in another state that assesses the same content areas, and is a high school exit exam. ▪ A student takes, with approval, and passes the Modified HSGQE or the Nonstandardized HSGQE in 10th grade. 	To qualify for a waiver a student must meet the criteria established in state regulations, complete the application, and receive approval for the waiver from the local school board that serves as the governing body. If a student is denied a waiver, the student may appeal the denial to EED.	PG – pages 20 - 21 4 AAC 06.772 4 AAC 06.773 4 AAC 06.774 4 AAC 06.775 (l)
Alternate Assessment	Certificate of Achievement	The student's cognitive ability and adaptive skill levels prevent completing the standard academic curricula, even with modifications and accommodations. The student requires extensive direct instruction in multiple settings to apply and transfer skills. The student is involved in an education program based on alternate achievement standards.	The student's IEP team must document reasons in the IEP for placing the student on the non-diploma track, which is the Alternate Assessment.	PG – page 7 4 AAC 06.775(b)

Nonstandardized HSGQE

The Nonstandardized HSGQE is available only to disabled students who

- are working at or near grade level;
- have taken but are not proficient on the HSGQE; and
- have a documented history of being unable to demonstrate proficiency on a standardized assessment because of one or more of the following conditions:
 - the student has a severe emotional or behavioral impairment or a pervasive developmental or other disability that causes the student to be unable to maintain sufficient concentration to participate in standard testing, even with accommodations or appropriate modifications;
 - the student cannot cope with the demands of a prolonged test administration because of multiple physical disabilities, severe health-related disabilities, or a neurological disorder;
 - the student has a significant motor or communication disability that causes the student to need more time than is reasonable or available for testing, even with the allowance of extended time.

Definitions

504 Plan - a plan that meets the requirements of 29 U.S.C. 794 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973).

Adaptation – a device or change to a test until it is determined to be an accommodation or a modification.

Accommodation – a change made to a testing situation to ensure that information obtained from an assessment is an accurate reflection of what the assessment is intended to measure.

Commissioner – Commissioner of Education and Early Development

EED – Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

HSGQE – High School Graduation Qualifying Examination

IEP – Individualized Educational Program

Modification – a change to the setting, timing, presentation, or response format of a standardized assessment that alters what the assessment measures.

Participation Guidelines (PG) – This document is adopted by reference, and communicates who can take statewide assessments with accommodations and modifications, and who can take the Nonstandardized HSGQE. Page numbers referred to in this document are from the Participation Guidelines for Alaska Students in State Assessments, 2004 edition, available online as a PDF which includes a foreword and table of contents.